R 080022Z JUL 08
FM AMEMBASSY ULAANBAATAR
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2336
INFO AMEMBASSY BEIJING
AMEMBASSY SEOUL
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
NSC WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS ULAANBAATAR 000332

SENSTIVE

STATE FOR EAP/CM, EAP/EX, DRL AND INR/EAP

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PGOV KDEM PHUM PREL KPAO MG
SUBJECT: Flavor of Mongolian Democracy: Impressions of Distant
Polling Stations

REF: (A) ULAANBAATAR 320   (B) ULAANBAATAR 322

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: This cable describes conditions at far-flung
polling stations in Khovd province some 1,500 kilometers from
Ulaanbaatar. The Embassy's election observation team was impressed
with the highly organized, efficient and transparent processes of
the local election committees as well as voters' commitment to the
democratic process, with some traveling great distances by horse to
just to cast their ballot on June 29. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) One of the Embassy's election monitoring teams for the
June 29 parliamentary election, comprised of the Consular Chief,
Pol/Econ Intern and FSN Interpreter, flew 1,500 km west of
Ulaanbaatar to Khovd province to observe the election process.
(Note: This is the farthest and most remote area international
election monitoring teams visited during Mongolia's election. End
Note). The team visited 11 polling stations in the aimag (province)
capital and surrounding areas and was impressed with the highly
organized, efficient and transparent processes of the local election
committees. Two of the polling stations the team visited were in
gers (Note: A ger is a temporary round felt shelter used by nomadic
herdsmen, perhaps better known as a "yurt" in Russian. End Note),
far from any paved road or permanent man-made structure. Although
remote and somewhat primitive, these ger polling stations were well
organized and run in strict accordance with Mongolia's Election
Law.

Democracy At Work In Isolated Ger Polling Stations

¶3. (SBU) To reach the Narriingol ("Narrow River") polling station,
the observation team traveled 30 km by four-wheel drive vehicle,
across rocky desert terrain and through the Buyant River. The small
ger was packed with observers, election officials and voters but
operated efficiently and in compliance with election rules. Some of
the 416 voters at this station traveled 50 km to vote, some by horse
but mostly by motorcycle or in vehicles provided by the non-partisan
local election committee. The voters here were excited about
participating in the democratic process and one of them, a horse
trainer dressed in his traditional Mongolian Del, proudly stated
that his district had the best 14 candidates in the whole country.
The big topics of discussion among voters outside the station were
cashmere prices, horse racing and cattle. A local doctor took
advantage of the large crowd to offer blood-pressure tests and other
medical advice to voters.

¶4. (SBU) The observation team also visited a more isolated polling
station also set up in a ger. Naranhairhang ("Sunny Mountain")
polling station was over 40 km from the paved roads of Khovd City
and it got its power from a small solar panel. All major political
parties had observers present and the polling station had all the
supplies, equipment and election personnel needed to handle its 201
registered voters. Naranhairhang's politically diverse election
committee greeted the observation team with excitement and was eager
to be photographed. Committee members expressed their appreciation

that international observers would travel so far to visit them. Some of the polling station's voters traveled as far as 80 km on horseback or motorcycle and by 16:00 on Election Day, 150 of them had already cast their votes. During the visit, local election officials offered observation team members dried cheese and other local delicacies as a gesture of hospitality. Even in this isolated region the polling station operated by-the-book and election officials were proud of their ability to provide people in the countryside a chance to exercise their democratic right to vote.

MINTON